

Pesticide Safety Alert

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is issuing this alert to its state, territorial and tribal pesticide partners to recommend increased vigilance of distribution and use of methyl bromide to ensure the product is not being misused, particularly in residential settings.

This alert is being issued following the misuse of a methyl bromide fumigant in a manner inconsistent with its label, in violation of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act. The misuse of methyl bromide in a residential setting resulted in the apparent pesticide poisoning suffered by a family of four visiting in St. John, USVI in March 2015. EPA is concerned that misuse may be more widespread than this occurrence. We will be issuing additional compliance guidance after an upcoming meeting with the State FIFRA Issues Research and Evaluation Group (SFIREG), on April 13-14, 2015.

Background:

Methyl bromide (MeBr) is a restricted use pesticide that is an odorless, colorless gas with very few approved uses in the United States. It is not approved for indoor residential uses. It is highly toxic and may be fatal if inhaled. Because methyl bromide dissipates so rapidly to the atmosphere, it is most dangerous at the actual fumigation site itself, meaning it does not leave a residue on crops but poses a potential threat to workers and other individuals near the application areas if safety precautions are not followed. Human exposure to high concentrations of methyl bromide can result in central nervous system and respiratory system failure, as well as specific and severe deleterious actions on the lungs, eyes, and skin.

Symptoms of exposure may be delayed and include dizziness, blurred vision, fatigue, weakness, staggering gait, slurred speech, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, and loss of muscle coordination. Effects of breathing high concentrations may include convulsions and lung damage.

Methyl bromide is approved for limited use as a fumigant and can only be used by a specially trained, certified applicator or person under their direct supervision. The primary use is for food quarantine and preshipment, to prevent certain pests from entering different countries. When used according to labeled directions and outlined in the approved critical use exemption, it is safe to eat food when methyl bromide has been used.

Methyl bromide is a potent ozone depleting substance and as such is also controlled under Title VI of the U.S. Clean Air Act (CAA). Applicators and distributors of methyl bromide may be subject to the reporting and recordkeeping requirements of the CAA which can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/ozone/record/mbr.html>.

EPA Responds to Incident that Leaves Four People Ill on St. John

EPA Working with U.S. Virgin Islands Government on Ongoing Investigation

The EPA is working closely with the U.S. Virgin Islands government to investigate an incident reported to the U.S. Virgin Islands government and EPA on March 20, 2015. Paramedics responded to a call that a family of four staying in Cruz Bay, St. John became very ill. Family members were subsequently hospitalized. The EPA is looking into whether the family was made ill by a pesticide called methyl bromide, which was used by Terminix to fumigate a unit at the resort on March 18, 2015. The use of methyl bromide in the U.S. is restricted due to its acute toxicity. Only certified applicators are allowed to use it and it is not authorized for indoor residential use. Health effects of acute exposure to methyl bromide are serious and include central nervous system and respiratory system damage. The EPA is continuing to work with the U.S. Virgin Islands government and others to gather information and will ensure that appropriate steps are taken to deter any additional misuse of this pesticide.